

Upper Columbia

UPDATE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE UPPER COLUMBIA ALTERNATIVE FLOOD CONTROL AND FISH OPERATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS)

ISSUE #8 — APRIL 2006

UCEIS to address flow component of 2006 USFWS BiOp

On Feb. 18, 2006, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) issued a new biological opinion, or BiOp, regarding the effects of operations of Libby Dam on endangered Kootenai River white sturgeon and threatened bull trout. The BiOp recommends the Corps and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) implement actions that will avoid jeopardizing sturgeon and adversely modifying critical habitat, and avoid jeopardizing bull trout.

The BiOp is adaptive and performance-driven, providing the Corps and BPA flexibility in the approach for achieving sturgeon habitat requirements - such as velocity, substrate, temperature and depth - needed for successful sturgeon spawning, and egg and larvae survival.

The flow component of the BiOp recommends testing, for a period of up to 14 days, flows up to 10,000cfs above the powerhouse capacity at Libby Dam, for a maximum of about 35,000cfs, when water supply conditions are suitable. The intent is to mimic timing, temperature, and shape of river flows existing before Libby Dam was built. While the BiOp calls for these flows in three of the next ten years, or if possible, three of the next four years, it also allows for attaining the habitat attributes through other means, such as habitat improvements.

Sturgeon flow augmentation would not voluntarily exceed flood stage and residents could expect to see river flows similar to the freshets they've seen for

the last several years. The higher dam releases for sturgeon would be completed by the end of June.

The 2006 FWS BiOp also recommends the Corps and BPA collaborate with technical and biological experts from states and tribes to develop an integrated and adaptive strategy to monitor the biological response to flows from Libby Dam during the spring and early summer. The Corps and BPA also are pursuing coordination with BC Hydro consistent with the Columbia River Treaty to address concerns the Canadians may have regarding this proposed change to Libby Dam operations.

The final Upper Columbia River Alternative Flood Control and Fish Operations Environmental Impact Statement (UCEIS), scheduled for completion in April 2006, will include an evaluation of the effects of spillway releases to achieve the BiOp-recommended flows. If conditions permit, it is possible that the Corps could spill water from Libby Dam as early as the end of May 2006.

For more detailed information, refer to the project website at:

<http://www.nws.usace.army.mil/PublicMenu/Menu.cfm?sitename=VARQ&pagename=VARQ>

This is the last edition of Upper Columbia Update!

To receive the executive summary, CD, or copy of the final EIS, send your name and complete mailing address to the contact below. Please specify which EIS format you wish to receive.

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Reclamation becomes cooperator on the UCEIS



DEFINITIONS IN THIS ISSUE

Biological Opinion:

A document written by the USFWS or NOAA Fisheries which includes: (1) the opinion of the Service as to whether or not a Federal action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of threatened or endangered species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat; (2) a summary of the information on which the opinion is based; and (3) a detailed discussion of the effects of the action on listed species or critical habitat.

In order to ensure the Corps actions are consistent with the terms of the 2006 USFWS BiOp (see story in this issue), and due to Reclamation's ongoing consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Reclamation has decided to step down from co-lead status on the UCEIS and move to cooperating agency status under NEPA regulations.

Each agency will prepare its own Record of Decision (ROD) for its respective dams to implement the final UCEIS for future operations. The Corps plans to issue a ROD during the spring of 2006 that addresses proposed implementation of the VARQ flood

control and fish flows up to 10,000 cfs above powerhouse capacity at Libby Dam. As a cooperating agency, Reclamation may choose to adopt and/or expand upon portions of the final UCEIS that apply to Reclamation's actions at Hungry Horse Dam. Reclamation plans to issue a ROD on the proposed implementation of VARQ flood control at Hungry Horse dam following the Reclamation's completion of NHPA Section 106 consultation and NEPA analysis and documentation.

In the interim, Reclamation will continue to implement such operations as described in its March 2002 voluntary Environmental Assessment.

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